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ABSTRACT

President George W. Bush's "No Child Left Behind" plan for educational improvement is based on four principles: accountability for results; local control and flexibility; expanded parental choice; and effective and successful programs. Improving education, however, will require more than just state officials, school boards, and school superintendents--communities will play an important role in providing oversight, ideas, and accountability. This guide explains what people can do to improve instruction and make schools more accountable for student performance. The guide shows community members some of the resources they can use to make sure "no child is left behind." It specifically shows: what high standards mean and do; what to look for in test scores; how communities can hold schools accountable for results; how to improve reading instruction; and where to turn for more information on how to get involved. (NKA)

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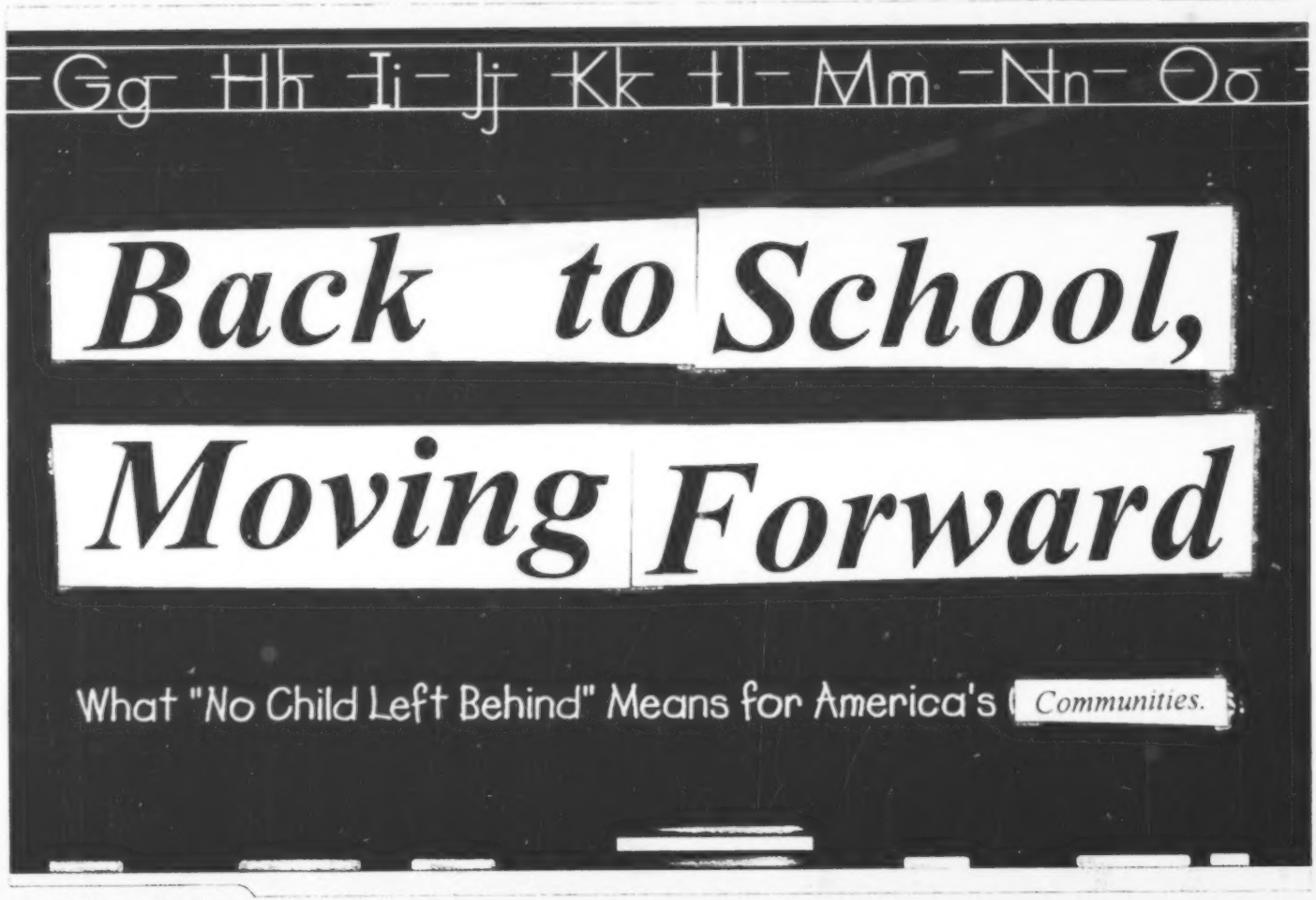

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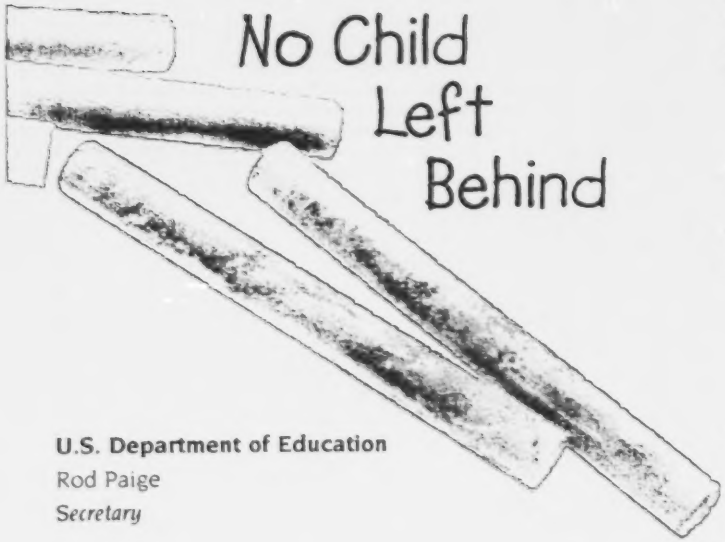

U.S. Department of Education
Rod Paige
Secretary

Office of Intergovernmental and Interagency Affairs
Laurie M. Rich
Assistant Secretary

Office of the Secretary
Office of Public Affairs
Lindsey C. Kozberg
Director

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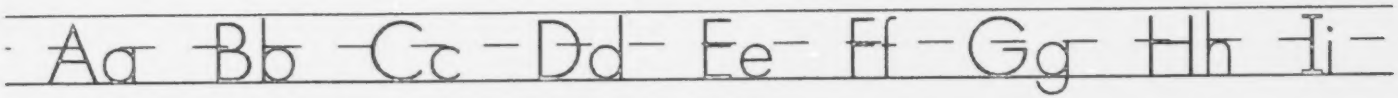


Back to School,
Moving Forward

What *No Child Left Behind* Means for America's Communities

Foreword by President George W. Bush

As a former student, the father of two high school graduates and the husband of a teacher, I have learned many lessons about what makes a school good and an education excellent. The more I see, the more I am convinced of one thing: every child can learn. Great schools do great works in the life of a child, and I have watched it happen. But we must do more.

Because I believe every child can learn, I intend to ensure that every child does learn. My Administration put forward a plan called *No Child Left Behind* based on four principles: accountability for results; local control and flexibility; expanded parental choice; and effective and successful programs. We are pursuing these principles because too many of our schools fail to help every child learn.

As America's children return to school, we should reflect on how we can improve their education. It's time to set high standards for what children should know and be able to do, to give our schools the tools they need to help children reach those high standards, and to demand that they reach them. We know that every child can learn; it is time to ensure that every child does learn.

Our schools are our responsibility, and all of us must take that responsibility seriously. Whether or not we have children in school, our business leaders, civic leaders and, indeed, all citizens have a stake in ensuring an excellent education for our children. This guide explains what you can do to improve instruction and make schools more accountable for student performance. I hope it starts a conversation in your community about how we can raise expectations for our children.

Letter from the Secretary

In 1965, Congress created a role for the federal government in education. Among other things, that role committed the government to helping students from disadvantaged backgrounds receive a quality education and gain access to a bright future. Many years and good intentions later, we still have not fulfilled that promise.

While states and school districts still bear the lion's share of responsibility for educating our children, President Bush and I are working with Congress to ensure that the federal role advances the kind of reform that improves our education system.

A key component of that reform is local control and flexibility. You and your neighbors know what your local schools need better than anyone in Washington; and we want you, through your state and local officials, to make those decisions.

Improving education, however, will require more than just state officials, school boards and school superintendents. Our communities will play an important role in providing oversight, ideas and accountability. This book explains the shape of things to come and shows you some of the resources you can use to make sure no child is left behind.

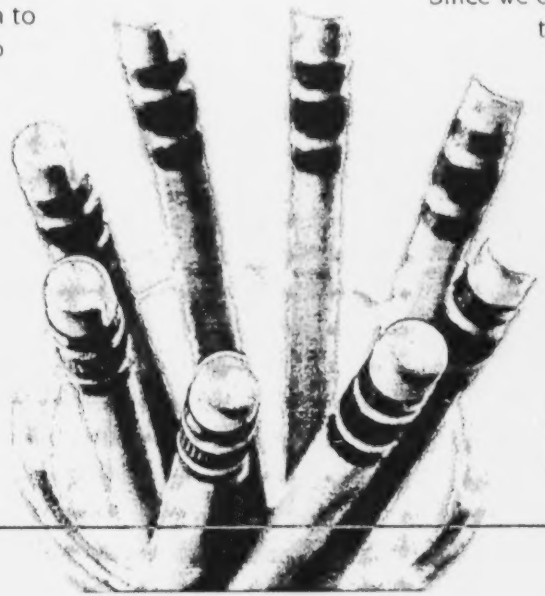
Rod Paige

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Aa Bb

Introduction

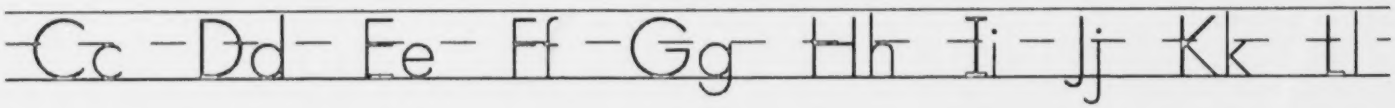
Our education system faces one of the toughest challenges any complex organization has ever had to face. For the first time in our nation's history, we are asking schools and teachers to educate all children to meet high standards. This is no simple task. Although many of our nation's schools are excellent, those that are not are leaving too many children behind.

Happily, there are people in our communities who know how to transform complex organizations to achieve higher performance: namely, our business and civic leaders.



President Bush's plan, *No Child Left Behind*, is based on many of the same principles that have renewed American business over the past two decades. At the heart of the President's plan is a promise to raise standards for all children.

Since we cannot know if we are meeting those standards unless we measure performance, President Bush is committed to annual assessments of student learning in the basic subjects of reading and math. The information from these tests will allow us to identify and reward schools that are making progress and to intervene in schools that are not. Finally, President Bush is committed



to doing what works, especially when it comes to teaching young children how to read.

In sum, this plan—in partnership with parents, communities, school leadership and classroom teachers—will ensure that every child in America receives a great education and that no child is left behind.

The following guide will show you—

- What high standards mean and do
- What to look for in test scores
- How communities can hold schools accountable for results
- How to improve reading instruction and
- Where to turn for more information on how to get involved

Raising Standards, Lifting Children

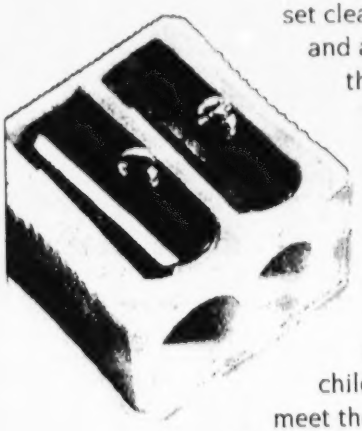
Every child in America deserves an excellent education. In order to strengthen the culture that binds our nation together, renew the democracy that empowers us all, and ensure that everyone enjoys the bounty of a strong economy, we must challenge all our children to read well, do difficult math, learn history, and understand science.

> *"Some say it is unfair to hold disadvantaged children to rigorous standards. I say it is discrimination to require anything less. It is the soft bigotry of low expectations."*
>
> **President George W. Bush**

Under President Bush's plan, states will set challenging standards in the core subjects of reading and math. Well-crafted standards must explain in plain language exactly what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. They must set clear

expectations so that teachers, parents and communities can all understand what should take place in the classroom.

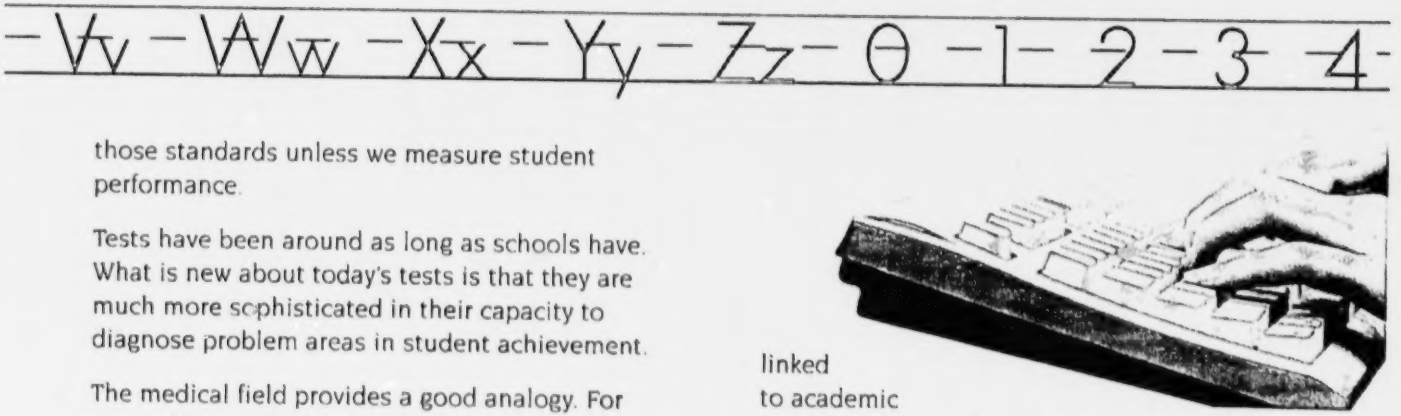
We know from business practices that if we want to boost performance, we must set clear, measurable goals and align our systems to them. In education, academic standards are the foundation of a performance-based system. High standards do not just help teachers; they also encourage children, because children tend to perform to meet the expectations of adults. If these expectations are low, children can miss their true potential. When expectations are high, progress can be amazing.



Read your state's education standards for any grade level. Think about them in the context of your local economy and the direction you want it to take. Do the standards seem rigorous enough? If not, tell the people who set them or help to set new ones. Public standards need input from business leaders, civic leaders and parents—not just education professionals. Engage in a conversation about standards and do something to understand and shape them.

Annual Testing: Learning What Works

Creating clear and rigorous academic standards is an important first step in improving our schools. We will never know, however, if we are reaching



those standards unless we measure student performance.

Tests have been around as long as schools have. What is new about today's tests is that they are much more sophisticated in their capacity to diagnose problem areas in student achievement.

The medical field provides a good analogy. For years, doctors used X-rays to diagnose broken bones and other ailments. They worked fine much of the time. But then came the MRI, a much more powerful diagnostic tool. Suddenly, doctors could identify a whole host of illnesses at much earlier stages and make better recommendations for courses of treatment.

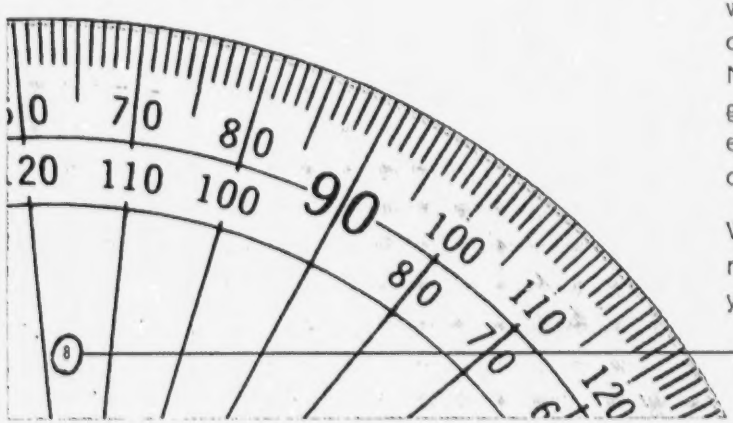
In much the same way, today's state-of-the-art tests can help educators identify the specific learning problems that each student is experiencing. Because these tests are directly linked to academic standards—a very important change from the past—we can find out quickly and accurately whether students are learning what they need to learn. These new tests do not simply measure basic skills; they measure important content knowledge too.

People complain that testing causes schools to emphasize "teaching to the test." Each state, however, must design tests that match what children are expected to learn. That means "teaching to the test" is really teaching those

5 6 7 8 9 Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee

things we have already decided every child should know and be able to do.

A good testing system that takes test data and breaks it down by student and classroom, as well as by school and by school district, can empower teachers to tailor their instruction to each student's needs. With tests aligned to state standards, the testing system can be designed to identify and then help the children who are in danger of being left behind.



Looking at Progress

Another benefit of annual testing is that it allows us to identify successful schools. Surprisingly often, two schools in the same neighborhood produce varying results. Students in one school excel, while those in the other stagnate. Testing brings these differences to light. It shows us the strengths of a successful school, which can be used as a model elsewhere, and tells us where and how to intervene in the failing school. Children who have a bad teaching experience take years to catch up. It is better to intervene early. That's why *No Child Left Behind* calls for annual testing in grades three through eight. This will permit the early identification of problems and allow rapid corrective action.

When you invest in a business, you demand a rigorous, objective account of its performance; and you also demand that its performance be

excellent. When you invest your taxes in a school, where children's futures are at stake, you should demand nothing less. Take action—and demand positive results.

Accountability

Academic standards and annual tests give communities a wealth of information that can and should prompt them to make important decisions. After several years of testing, clear pictures tend to emerge about the performance of the system and of individual schools. The data on student achievement serve as education's "bottom line."

Once communities have this information, they must use it. Commend the best schools and replicate their best practices. Identify and intervene in struggling schools. If schools persist in failure, use test data to build the case for change, such as the replacement of the principal or teaching staff or some other form of reorganization. Demand improvement. Decline excuses.

In President Bush's plan, low-performing schools will be identified and given extra help. If they do not improve after several years, then states and districts must take action, or parents will be given federal assistance to send their children to a different, and better public school or to pay for private tutoring.

The most dangerous thing you can do for your community is to assume that "the experts" are running the schools just fine. If they are not giving

good answers to your questions—or if you and your peers are not asking any questions—the children of your community are missing the opportunity to reach their full potential. People who struggle to acquire as adults the education they should have received as children display admirable tenacity—but they will tell you that they would have preferred to get it right the first time. For today's children, it is not too late to get it right, if you take action now.

Doing What Works: Evidence-Based Reading Instruction

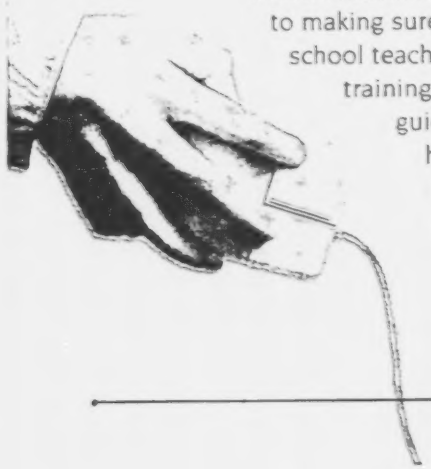
Teaching children to read is the most important thing our schools do. Yet, for too long, schools have been embroiled in bitter debates about how to teach this most basic skill. Thankfully, in recent years, scientists have evaluated good reading instruction and curricula and determined the best way to teach reading skills effectively to young children. The researchers tell us that 95 percent of all children will learn to read if they are taught using:

- Systematic and explicit instruction in phonics, decoding, comprehension and literature appreciation
- Daily exposure to a variety of texts, both fiction and nonfiction, as well as incentives to read independently and with others
- Vocabulary instruction that emphasizes the relationships among words and among word structure, origin and meaning

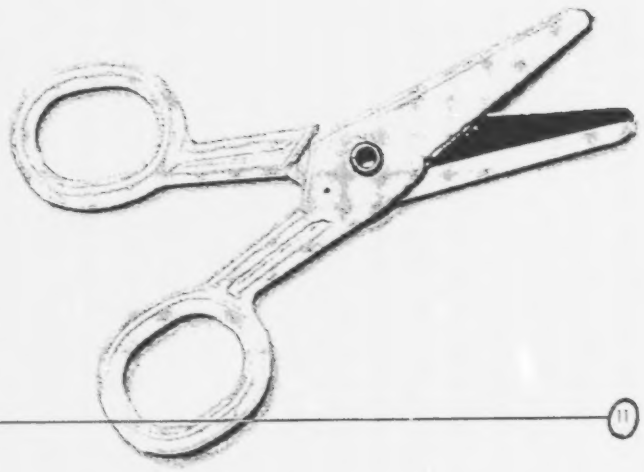
Xx Yy Zz 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

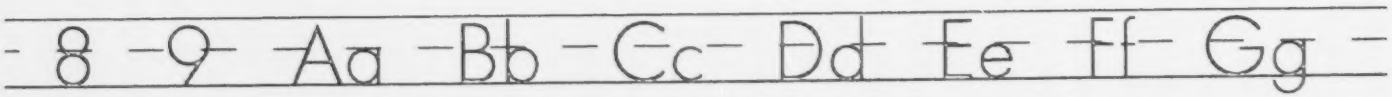
- Instruction in comprehension that includes predicting outcomes, summarizing, clarifying, questioning and visualizing.
- Frequent opportunities to write

These guidelines have proved effective in even the toughest of classrooms. Many classrooms filled with children considered "difficult to educate" are doing an excellent job, so we know it can be done. President Bush is committed to making sure all elementary school teachers have solid training in these reading guidelines, which is why he has proposed his Reading First initiative. Now that we know what works, we must do what works.



As part of your school system's most important constituency, you should consider calling your local school district or a nearby elementary school to find out if its reading instruction programs employ these proven practices. If it does not, you can refer officials to the reading resources listed at the end of this book.





Resources

Interested in learning more about improving the education system in your community? If you have access to the Internet, go to **www.ed.gov** for Department of Education resources plus links to other organizations. If you don't have a computer, you can call **1-800-USA-LEARN**.

For general information on back to school, and to order copies of this booklet, visit **www.ed.gov/backtoschool/**

The *National Reading Panel* produces objective reports about what works and what doesn't in reading. **www.nationalreadingpanel.org**

The *National Institute of Child Health and Human Development* offers health and education information for parents. **www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/health.htm**

The *Partnership for Family Involvement in Education* offers tips for getting involved in your local schools and school district. **www.pfie.ed.gov**

FREE offers hundreds of teaching and learning resources from across the federal government. **http://www.ed.gov/free/**

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